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AUTHOR	Barraclough, Terry
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ABSTRACT

Many parents and community members throughout the nation, dissatisfied with the education their children are receiving, are demanding a voice in the educational process. This demand is expressed in the movements for community involvement in the schools, community schools, and community control of schools. Twelve documents investigate the concept, history, and offshoots of the movement for community control of schools. The documents in this review center on community control, particularly as formulated and practiced in urban minority communities. (Author)

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December 1973 Number 26

Community Control of Schools

Terry Barraclough

> . . . the overcentralization and bureaucratization of city school systems, and, their resultant failure to respond to mounting community needs stimulated the development of community schools. Ultimately, this bureaucratic stasis led to the transformation of the concept of community participation into what is now known as community control.
>
> *Herrick (1969)*

> Community control is properly seen as an agent for change in urban affairs. It would bring about qualitative improvements through the introduction of the discipline implicit in accountability.
>
> *Bourgeois (1969)*

The desire for self-determination and the growing dissatisfaction with the quality of education offered their children have led many parents and communities into the struggle for community-controlled schools. Many urban minority neighborhoods are now experimenting with community control. There are no objective criteria by which to determine the success of these experiments in improving educational quality, but response from the community is generally favorable.

Community control, at the very least, hopes to allow the school to reflect the values and culture of the community it serves, thus facilitating the socializing function of education. At best, community control of schools gives the community the power necessary to improve its children's education.

Ideally, community control integrates the school and the community, greatly reducing the friction between the neighborhood and the educational establishment. In community-controlled schools, the professional bureaucracy that has run the schools for so long will not be deposed, but will be held accountable to the community. Of course, community control necessitates a new breed of personnel: the school community agent. These professionals will be responsible for working with administrators, faculty, staff, and community members (including students) to develop new programs and practices to better serve the community.

The documents in this review focus chiefly on the concept of community control of schools: what community control means, why the movement is spreading, and how community control works. Other documents delineate the history of the movement, describe the relationship between community schools and community control, and present case studies of community-controlled schools.

Four of the documents reviewed are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Complete ordering instructions follow the review.

THE CONCEPT

Hagood (1969) distinguishes community control of schools from decentralization. Decentralization offers the community a modicum of participation in decision-making. Community control stresses the desirability of integrating the school into the total community. The result of such integration is that "the community, in its totality, educates."

The concept of community control derives from attempts by members of the black community to determine their own destiny. In current practice, professional educators and special interest groups such as textbook publishers, realtors, landowners, and politicians form interlocking subsystems that Hagood terms the educational complex. These interest groups often challenge one another for relative power. Community control would ideally redistribute power outside the complex, in the community.

According to Deshler and Erlich (1972), the push for citizen involvement and community control of schools is not caused solely by the growing militancy of urban community groups in pursuit of self-determination. The community education movement itself is spreading rapidly. Local citizens in larger cities are advocating radical change in school governance because of the failure of professional educators to improve learning in ghetto schools. The general alienation of young people has had profound consequences in the public schools, especially discrediting the authority of teachers and administrators. Demystification of the educational process and the proliferation of popular literature on educational subjects have also created interest in community involvement.

With the professionalization of education, governance passed from the community to professional administrators. Deshler and Erlich advocate a return to public accountability and community control of education, citizen involvement in the process of decision-making, greater expectancies concerning the abilities of students, and a more unified socialization

process using the resources of both community and school. The authors describe a continuum between community involvement and community control: at first, citizens are involved in decision-making, working with specialists and staff; then the citizens exert more and more control over their school, working with a school community agent for technical expertise; and eventually community control becomes a reality.

> Real, lasting, pervasive power must reside in effective collaboration between the community (including students) and the school in *all* decision-making processes.
>
> *Deshler and Erlich (1972)*

Davis (1970) claims the issue in black education is control of the educational process. The racism and incompetence of professional educators have functioned to deprive black children of a quality education. The quality of education is determined by who runs the schools, and black parents and communities should now be given the opportunity to fashion the education their children need.

An article by Bourgeois (1969) cites the need for community control of schools to strengthen the bargaining positions of poor and black communities. Community control of schools is a first step in easing the tensions and feelings of powerlessness in urban communities and will enable the schools to reflect the goals of their communities.

According to Cohen (1969), decentralization of school systems to allow local control of the educational process would be costly but would reduce racial tension. A less costly, and perhaps better, method of reducing racial disparities in children's educational achievement might be to reduce the disparities in their parents' social and economic status.

THE HISTORY

Mills (1972) traces precursors of community control from 1840 to the early 1940s. A lunch program in New York's Lower East Side with kosher meals for Jewish children and Italian meals for Italian children and a health program including regular visits to students' homes are a small part of the efforts made fifty and a hundred years ago to meet the needs of immigrant school children.

Efforts such as the lunch and health programs suggest a new perspective on community control, a perspective in which current demands for community control, especially among black and Puerto Rican parents, may be seen as an extension of, rather than an exception to, the demands of urban minorities in the past. The scope and variety of past demands for community-controlled schools in New York City are especially visible in the actions of three groups: Irish Catholics in the 1840s, Jews near the turn of the century, and Italians in the middle 1930s and early 1940s.

In the Irish, Jewish, and Italian communities in which such community and educational leaders as Bishop John Hughes, Julia Richman, and Leonard Covello worked, the idea of a community-oriented school struck a responsive chord. Those communities, viewed in perspective, exhibited interest in virtually every community control issue now debated, from food to curriculum.

Martell (1970) offers a generalized history of the community control movement

in education, centering his discussion on systems of local control in New York City and Toronto. He notes rather pessimistically that the present educational system is at fault for defects and inequities in education, and that the locus of control is a secondary consideration.

> Community control will only result in a limited amount of improvement in a system that couldn't be "more futile or destructive."
>
> *Martell (1970)*

Rubinstein (1970) has edited a collection of articles revolving around the struggle of black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers for full racial equality through community control of schools. Articles cover board of education policy on integration, the struggle between the Harlem community and the local school board, and the failure of schools to teach poor children. Others focus on the "pathological bureaucracy" of the city school system; the treatment of "difficult" and "disruptive" children; and the collusion among the board of education, two favored construction companies, and the nearly all-white construction unions.

Another chapter describes from the inside the "financial rise and human fall" of the United Federation of Teachers. The remaining articles discuss community control and its effects on Harlem and Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the state of community control experiments throughout the country, and some economic factors involved in the opposition of local power structures to any improvements in the education of black children.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Herrick (1969) describes the educational cycles of urban schooling from 1898 through the current movement toward decentralization. Political exploitation for personal profit gave way to the theory that "professionals" should control the schools without "outside interference." The present interest in community education is a direct reaction to the failure of professionals to provide adequately for the disadvantaged.

According to Herrick, this revolution is moving in five directions: decentralization in administration; involvement in decision-making by lay people with children in the schools; the use of professional or semiprofessional staff such as aides, community coordinators, and agents; the appearance of the "community school" with expanded social and educational services; and the emergence of radical teacher organizations demanding bargaining and decision-making power. Against this background, the author discusses New York City's decentralization progress and the proposed institution of sixty separate school districts. Herrick also cites New Haven's experimental community school as an excellent example of fusing city planning and educational and social service needs.

REFERENCES

Documents cited with ED numbers are abstracted in *Research in Education*. The complete texts are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), commercial channels, or both. Publications can be ordered in either Xerox copy form (HC) or microfiche (MF).

For each order, indicate the ED numbers of the desired publications, the type of reproduction desired (paper or microfiche), and the number of copies being ordered.

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Journal articles cited with EJ numbers are indexed in *Current Index to Journals in Education*, a monthly companion index to *Research in Education*. Reproductions of the journal articles are not available from EDRS.

Address requests to ERIC Document Reproduction Service, P.O. Drawer O, Bethesda, Maryland 20014.

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RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Community control is properly seen as an agent for change in urban affairs.
Bourgeois (1969)

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The community, in its totality, educates.

Hagood (1969)

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